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**WHIRLING HYBRIDS:**  
A DICHOTOMY OF BELONGING

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RABEYA KHATOON

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, all praise to Almighty for giving me the strength, motivation and ability to complete this thesis.

Sincere thanks to my primary advisor Diane C Derr, for continuously supporting my research topic through her patience, determination, and knowledge. I am grateful for my associate advisors, Denielle Emans, Levi Hammett and my reader Sean Roberts for their insightful comments and encouragement. My committee genuinely guided me in the right direction whenever I needed it. I would like to thank Rab McClure, Marco Bruno and Dr. Thomas Modeen, for their constant support in this process.

Heartfelt gratitude to my dear friend Alisha Saiyed, for always being supportive and encouraging. I am forever grateful to her, Adnan Nawab and family, who were involved in the process of making this thesis project a success, from miles away.

To the interviewees, thank you for sharing your stories with me. Without your participation and input, the project could not have been successfully conducted. I appreciate Kharadi Chandrakant, for helping me with the fabrication of my designs. His skills and passion facilitated my making process.

I express my sincere gratitude to my parents and my siblings for providing me with continuous support and prayers throughout my years of study. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

To my friends, thank you for listening, offering me advice, and supporting me through this entire process. I appreciate the discussions, all-nighters, dinners, and laughs that helped me stay sane during this journey.

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“So, here you are  
too foreign for home,  
too foreign for here.  
Never enough for both.”

- Ijeoma Umebinyuo

# ABSTRACT

## **WHIRLING HYBRIDS: A DICHOTOMY OF BELONGING**

Migration is a phenomenon wherein individuals relocate from one country to another, albeit temporarily or permanently, for numerous reasons. The State of Qatar is a highly diverse nation with a large population of foreign residents. According to Priya D'Souza, as of 2017, 60 percent of the resident population in Qatar are from South Asia. Growing up in this environment, third culture kids develop a unique, hybrid culture through experiencing multiple cultures. This research investigates a dichotomy of belonging from the perspective of South Asians in Qatar. A series of hybridized spinning tops were produced in collaboration with a South Asian artisan. These hybridized artifacts are infused with sensory materials in order to elicit an emotive response, engage memory, and celebrate the merging of diverse cultures.



# INTRODUCTION

In her Ted talk 'Don't ask me where I am from, ask me where I am local' Taiye Selasi says, "from newspapers, textbooks, conversations, I had learned to speak of countries as if they were eternal, singular, naturally occurring things, but I wondered: to say that I came from a country suggested that the country was an absolute, some fixed point in place and time, a constant thing, but was it?"<sup>[1]</sup>

Countries appear and they disappear. History, culture, tradition, religion and human experiences are authentic, but countries are expressions of sovereign statehood that are invented.<sup>[2]</sup>



Figure1. Prevailing Religions of the British Indian Empire, 1909[1504×1232]

My parents and grandparents were born in countries that no longer exist. Geographically, of course, their locations remain the same, but their political status has radically changed. In August 1947 British India was partitioned into two independent nations: India and Pakistan (comprising West and East Pakistan, present-day Bangladesh), ending three hundred years of colonial rule.<sup>[3]</sup> Bangladesh, a country that was called 'East Pakistan' after the British left in 1947, has only existed since 1971.<sup>[4]</sup> My grandfather who was born in the 1920s, called British India home until the 1947 partition and then he called Bangladesh home from 1971. My father was born in East Pakistan and called it home for ten years. After the independence, my father called Bangladesh home until 1985, when he migrated to Qatar. My parents have been living in Qatar for over three decades now.

"Third culture kids" (TCK) are individuals raised in a culture distinct from both their parents' and the culture of the country named on their passport. A TCK builds relationships with the different cultures he/she is raised into, while not having full ownership of any single culture.<sup>[5]</sup> As a TCK, I grew up in a place far from home for two decades, and yet this ultimately became home. If this is home to me, my family, friends, and many others who grew up in mixed cultures, what defines where we are from? A clear answer to this question has always eluded me. The Nigerian writer Ijeoma Umebinyuo says, "so, here you are- too foreign for home, too foreign for here. Never enough for both."<sup>[6]</sup> This resonates with my own experience.



Figure 2. A map of political divisions in South Asia. From 1947 - 1971 East Pakistan was part of Pakistan after which it became the independent country of Bangladesh (Map by Julius Paulo).



Human migration is a phenomenon wherein an individual uproots from one place to another with the intention of settling permanently or temporarily in a new location, for employment opportunities, a better quality of life, family obligations and many other reasons. The decision to leave home results in new contextual situations where they are compelled to adapt new cultures and build a relationship with a foreign land. The question “where do I belong?” has a strong personal connection to me, my family, and foreign residents all over the world from all walks of life. The conditions that factor into a definition of belonging could include; memories, environment, and personal relationships among others. According to Priya D’Souza, communications specialist, the statistics on Qatar’s growing population show that, migration to Qatar is primarily driven by the country’s rapid development.<sup>[7]</sup>

This thesis aims to translate personal narratives into hybrid artifacts in order to emphasize and examine the notion of belonging from different perspectives. The questions ‘where is home?’ and ‘where do we belong?’ are subjective to individual experiences. Hence, this thesis does not intend to find an answer to the questions, but rather to embrace these hybrid cultures and to create products that explore and celebrate the hybridity of diverse cultures. This thesis takes a critical design approach to investigate the dichotomy between home and a sense of belonging from the outlook of foreign residents in Qatar. In doing so, this thesis surveys sources to analyze human migration as a recurring phenomenon and the factors influencing the population change in the country in order to redefine migrant identities.



# BACKGROUND

## Human migration as a recurring phenomenon

Migration can take place multiple times in an individual's life. The United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights has established that migrants are "people who are outside the territory of which they are nationals or citizens, are not subject to its legal protection, and are in the territory of another state." <sup>[8]</sup>

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is that migration can take place within an individual's own country.

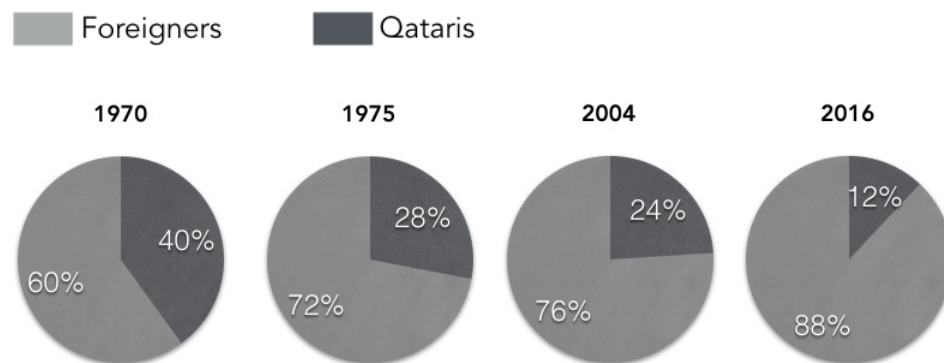
"Historically, in Europe, this type of migration goes back hundreds of years as people began to move from rural to industrialized urban centers. State persecution can and does lead to alarming cases of internal migration even today. Nomadic people across the planet have engaged in seasonal internal migration for thousands of years." <sup>[9]</sup>

These definitions reveal how difficult it is to define what constitutes a migrant and thus how nations' legislations differ in accordance with their own understanding of the terms.



According to the research analyst Merven Piesse the reasons for human migration can vary; while social, political and economic developments are exceptionally difficult to predict precisely, judgements can be made based upon current situations. Piesse states that “economic disparity between developing and developed economies encourages the movement of skilled labor from the former to the latter.”<sup>[10]</sup> Changes in the ecological environment and limited access to resources may encourage people to migrate to countries where resources are more accessible.

### Population of Qatar: Nationals vs Foreigners



### Factors affecting population change in Qatar

Qatar is a success story on the whole, but a distinctive one, and not without problems. This young nation offers some lessons as it goes through a period of rapid development within its economy, political system, social norms and customs.<sup>[11]</sup> Several factors have and continue to affect population change in the country including migration and Qatarization. Qatar is a diverse country in which Qatari nationals make up only 12% of the whole (2,673,022) population.<sup>[12]</sup> Statistics have shown that the non- Qatari

residents’ population of the country has increased tremendously since 1970. More than 60% of the current population in Qatar are South Asian nationals<sup>[13]</sup> “According to Qatar’s Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, it is estimated that the daily change rates of Qatar’s population in 2018 amount to 84 live births average per day (3.50 in an hour), 10 deaths average per day (0.43 in an hour) and 252 migrants average per day (10.49 in an hour). The estimated population of Qatar will be increased by 325 persons daily in 2018.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Qatarization is an initiative crafted to increase the number of Qatari citizens employed in both the public and private sectors. According to this initiative, more than fifty percent of employees in a company should be Qatari nationals. Economic diversification and Qatarization remain crucial to the shift of population change in Qatar. According to Matthew Gray, “if a simple quota system continues to be the effect of the Qatarization policy, then Qataris will not find themselves in positions that give them truly meaningful work.”<sup>[15]</sup> Diversification of the population will continue to be essential, as a significant portion of Qatar’s GDP comes from the energy sector and the majority of migrant labor can be found in the construction sector, neither of which employ a significant number of Qataris’. According to Gray “diversification of the population will need to be achieved to a much greater extent than at present to ensure sufficient numbers of skilled prestigious positions for Qataris. Qataris seek out positions that have particular status or respect attached to them.”<sup>[16]</sup>

“The Qatar National Vision 2030 is the Qatari government’s central strategic document on socio-economic development and other development related national initiatives. It is, therefore, the first point of reference in terms of what the government says its development goals are and serve as a foundation for many of the policies and reforms that are undertaken.”<sup>[17]</sup>

In alignment with the vision, the government of Qatar has been keen to develop the education and high-end training sector, enhancing the prospects for Qataris in more skilled and prestigious roles. Thus, foreign labor is



required and will continue to be needed in the country, even if Qatarization meet its goals, to fill the role of several other jobs such as construction-workers, caretakers, security guards and many other occupations.

## Defining migrant identity

A brief explanation, defining migrant identity, can be found in the poem "Where do I belong?" by Omila Thounaoiam, a research scholar and writer at Assam University

"Where is my identity? When I'm divided into multiple selves. Trying to fit in the new worlds I was transported into. What home means to me now? When my past never abandons my present. Fragments of memories haunt me throughout. Locating, dislocating and relocating my<sup>[18]</sup> sense of self caught up in a flux of never-ending quest for permanence!"

The definition of home remains ambiguous to a large number of migrants who have resided in Qatar for decades, working in numerous occupational environments and supporting their families. If Qatar is home to many of these diverse groups of people, then what parts of their home-country's culture, objects, customs, and beliefs are being interchanged?

An article 'Open Doors but Different Laws; Migration in the Gulf,' in The Economist mentions that "Under the sponsorship system used in GCC, foreign workers are tied to their local employers. They may not switch jobs or, in some cases, leave the country without their employer's permission."<sup>[19]</sup> Even after many years of living and working in Qatar, foreign residents are only allowed to stay in Qatar with a renewable residence permit under a local sponsor or employer, who is responsible for their visa and legal status. Qatar does not offer citizenship or any special benefits to people who have lived in the country for decades or generations.







According to Allen Fromherz, the director of Middle East Studies Center at Georgia State University, "the 'price' of modernity in Qatar is the existence of an expatriate culture. However, this expatriate culture is kept subservient in terms of rights and access to Qatar's economy."<sup>[20]</sup>

"Gulf citizens and their governments have failed to consider that they are themselves a source of the decisions that have led to the rise of expatriate culture, and with it the challenge of integrating that culture into Qatari society."<sup>[21]</sup>

Many of Qatar's foreign residents strongly relate to the questions 'where is home?' and 'where do I belong?'. How do people who have lived outside their home country for decades and call a foreign land their home, define belonging? The dilemma of home and belonging is further explained, again, by Selasi in her talk 'Don't ask me where I'm from, ask where I'm a local'.

"Most introductions begin with reference to nation, as if knowing what country, I came from would tell my audience who I was. My experiences define where I'm from. You can take away my passport, but you can't take away my experience."<sup>[22]</sup>

The diverse families and third culture kids (TCK) living in Qatar share and interchange elements from their cultures such as language, food, music and many others. Often times, these mixed culture kids remain foreign to both cultures, creating a new identity based on the hybrid cultures, histories and experiences within which they are raised.

Most individuals develop very strong emotional attachments to the places they have lived for decades. These affectionate bonds between people and places go by different names, such as 'Topophilia' and 'Rootedness'. The feeling of home and belonging transcend attachments for the physical location itself to the people and experiences in the locality. The passage of time strengthens attachment to these places.<sup>[23]</sup> Thus, the word 'home' connotes more than just a house. The definition of home is unique to every individual's experiences that is determined from the locality, culture, and environment to which they are accustomed.



# PRECEDENT STUDY

Circumstances, situation, location, and environment can affect the necessities of migration. Design can be used in different forms to address an individual's concept of belonging. The following set of precedents, selected from the fields of product design, fashion design, and communication design, explore the definition of migration through their own disciplinary lens. These precedents explore the concept of home, identity or belonging through hybridization of different objects, using various materials and media.

## The Multi - Locals by Sia Hurtigkarl Degel

'The Multi - Locals' is a series of wearable props used in an editorial campaign to explore the question: 'Where are you a local?'. "These objects reflect modern nations that are collaged together by thousands of individual stories and combinations of origin."<sup>[24]</sup> The project asks viewers to imagine what future identities will look like in terms of what various localities can offer. Each wearable translates the identity of the locality based on a person's place of origin. The wearables give a tangible uniform to the identity of the locals in a society.

Participants in this project reference images of former homes or places in the local streets, snapshots from the natural environment or personal objects recalling memories to describe the feeling of being local. The masks and clothing were designed through a hybrid approach combining representations of an individual's background with culturally significant patterns production techniques.<sup>[25]</sup>

The concept of 'local' for foreign residents who have resided in the State of Qatar for decades is layered and multifaceted. Foreign residents in Qatar are permitted to stay in the country with a renewable residence permit under a Qatari sponsor or employer. In accordance, the notion of being 'local' poses a difficult dilemma for a foreign resident in Qatar. The hybridity of materials used in 'The Multi-Locals' presents a unique approach to the concept of identity constructed through tangible objects and materials related to place.



Figure 3. The Multi - Locals by Sia Hurtigkarl Degel



## Hybrid Virtual Objects for Digital Virtuosity by Bastiaan de Nennie

The designer Bastiaan de Nennie 3D scanned antique, every day, physical objects such as steering wheels and buttons. He then digitally deconstructed and reconstructed them in what he describes as a "reversed design process." These new, reconstructed objects are hybrid forms from the pre-digital era. He describes this process in stating,

"I work this way because I am fascinated by the number of products we produce and the beautifully designed shapes from the pre-digital era which almost no one uses anymore," he added, "By doing this I try to give these shapes a new life and value in the digital design process."<sup>[26]</sup>

This project demonstrates the potential in designing new utilitarian objects through a process of digital hybridity. As seen in figure 4, elements of a telephone, a stool, a steering wheel and a car are configured into an abstracted chair.

These new, alternative objects, in turn, engender an alternative meaning. In exploring this approach, I saw potential of using digital tools to create hybridity of very different objects.

Figure 4. Hybrid Virtual Objects for Digital Virtuosity series by Bastiaan de Nennie



## COSMO - Design for Migration by Bakary Darboe, Lupo, and Burtscher

'Cosmo' is a collaboration between two designers and number of artisans who have migrated from their home countries (refugees, migrants and immigrants). These migrants collaborate to design products and elements that are relatable to other migrants. These hybrid projects are combinations of thoughts and various elements from different cultures that explore migrant identity. According to the designers the project,

"...produces and markets its own objects and serves as a platform for sharing new possibilities, knowledge and experience. Its focus is on collaboration informed and inspired by personal histories and cultural origins. The aim is that this intercultural dialogue will contribute to a new sense of identity."<sup>[27]</sup>

These objects and projects are exhibited at different locations to show the meaning of identity from the perspective of migrants and refugees from different countries. Figure 5, a cup made out of clay and wood, is a hybrid of two different design processes, and materials. The shape and the pattern of the cup is derived from the individual's rural place of origin. The wooden element is meant to reference a coffee mug holder typically found in urban cities, to which the refugee migrated.

The project corresponds with the idea of hybrid identities of foreign residents who have resided in Qatar for decades. The State of Qatar is a highly diverse nation with a large population of foreign residents. In accordance, the concept of designing hybrid objects that represent these foreign residents align with the research of this thesis. Through material, process, and form 'COSMO' translates migrant narratives into hybrid objects.



Figure 5. COSMO - Design for Migration by Bakary Darboe, Lupo and Burtscher

The selected precedents showcase approaches of hybridity through different mediums to consider home, belonging, and identity. 'The Multi-Locals' and 'COSMO' explore home and identity as a migrant through collaboration. 'Hybrid Virtual Objects' uses digital modes of production to design new hybrid objects.

# RESEARCH METHODS

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted, as a primary and essential research method, to collect personal narratives of experiences, opinions, and perceptions of South Asian residents in Qatar.

Interviewees consisted of South Asian youth who have lived in Qatar for more than one decade. The interviews were intended to be conversational, allowing the participants to drive the session. They were conducted with the following set of open-ended questions:

- How long have you lived in Qatar?
- What is your definition of home?
- Where is home for you? (A physical space, location, place or country)
- Where do you feel like you belong?
- What object, material, place reminds you of home?
- What object, material, place, do you. Think reflects your identity?



A key finding from the interviews was the extent to which the interviewees related senses to home. A number of the interviewees connected visual and olfactory senses to memories from the past that reminded them of home. Below are few quotes from the interviewees.



**Mohammed Jawad**

*Pakistani national, born in UAE,  
currently residing in Qatar*

"As a TCK, I do not consider Pakistan home, but I feel at home where my family is because I feel ease and comfort over there. When I think about objects or materials, something that comes to mind is food, just the smell, like rain – mud after rain or wood burning. These scents being memory of home." (Mohammed Jawad)



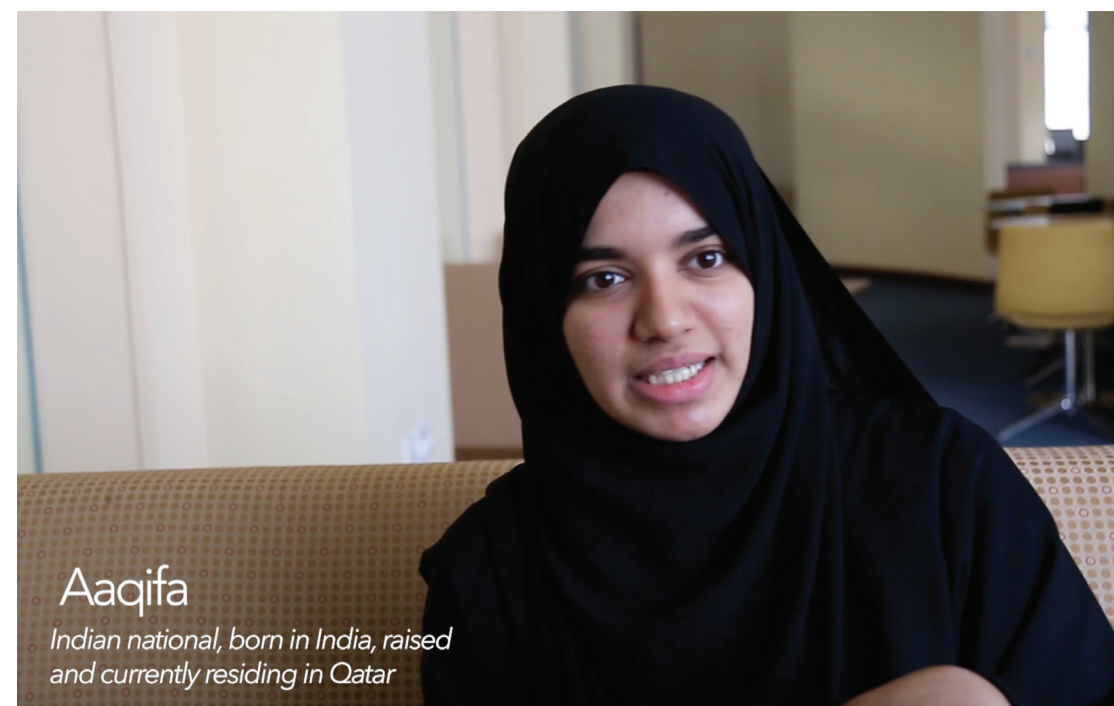
**Nimrah**

*Indian national, born in Kuwait,  
currently residing in Qatar*

"Every physical space here is something I can relate to, architecture, roads. Unlike the roads in India and navigation is very difficult. My face covering, my niqab represents my identity. I know I want to be identified by my niqab." (Nimrah)



"Wherever my parents are is home for me. I think my identity is the way I dress, it's a mix of Sri Lanka and Arab culture because I have lived in Oman and Qatar." (Zeinah Zahir)



"I feel like I belong the most in circles of faith, or when we are having intellectual conversations. I got the Qur'an, because I feel like this is my identity and the person I am, this is what reminds me of home." (Aqifa Altaf)





"The call to prayer reminds me of 'home'" (Moomthahinah)



"Home to me is the concept of being with my mom." (Johana Nasreen)

There were several common elements identified by the interviewees including the concept of family, religion and their physical surroundings. Many South Asian residents in Qatar live away from their extended family, hence the relationship with their parents and siblings is a mutual feeling that connects them to home. Several interviewees talked about Muslim faith as a core factor that connects them to their identity. These South Asian residents also identified the significance of neighborhoods and landmarks in Qatar such as roundabouts. Additionally, interviewees described the smell of food, rain, oud, and patterns from traditional fabrics and objects as providing a sense of belonging for them. The findings from the interviewees further directed my experiments, wherein I explored objects, forms, and materials.

## Experiment #1 Assessment of objects

Based on findings from the interviews, as well as my own experiences as a South Asian raised in Qatar, a preliminary assessment of objects was conducted. South Asian countries, particularly Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have similarities in language, ethnicity, festivals and traditions. This assessment was driven by different aspects of what nostalgia for home meant to me and my interviewees. The objects identified by the interviewees, included woven baskets and spinning tops or yoyos, from South Asia and Qatari culture. The following images (fig 6, fig 7) illustrate their similarities and differences. These objects are emblematic of visual pattern, form and language, in everyday objects.

Weaving patterns (fig 6), used to make baskets in each of these regions, share nuanced similarities yet have their own uniqueness in the craft. In both regions, weaving is used to produce baskets however, the patterns are specific to the individual regions. The weaving patterns highlight significant visual elements familiar to South Asian residents in Qatar.



Figure 6. Images of weaving pattern from Qatar (left) and Bangladesh (right)

## Experiments

The following experiments were conducted after analyzing the responses from the interviewees. The initial experiment focused on an assessment of the objects and behaviors in South Asia and the Gulf region, specifically those of Bangladeshi and Qatari cultures. These objects and behaviors were identified from personal experiences described by the interviewees. The second experiment reflected on the significance of scent as described by the interviewees. Consideration was given to the various way necessary in activating the different scents. The final experiment explored spinning tops as a medium to store scents and translate visual patterns with a focus on material and form.

Spinning tops and yoyos were assessed as they were identified as a toy commonly played with by children in both Bangladesh and Qatar. In addition to the interviewee's experiences, the spinning top has a strong connection, for me, to my childhood. Growing up in Bangladesh during the first three years of my life, I played with spinning tops along with my cousins. After I migrated to Qatar yoyos replaced the spinning tops. My life changed significantly when my family migrated to Qatar, including my basic mode of play. After migrating to Qatar, surrounded by strangers, new sights and new smells, the enjoyment of playing traditional outdoor games had changed into uneventful indoor games. This assessment of visual pattern, form and language, in everyday objects presented an opportunity to consider potential intersections for hybridity in material and form.

## Experiment #2: Olfactory Exploration

The following exploration was driven by a key finding from the interviews; an emotive connection between smell and memories of home. These scents included the smell of rain (also known as petrichor), oud, burning wood, sandalwood, rose, jasmine and vanilla. This exploration focused on an incorporation of smell into the hybrid construction of an object.

Oud or agarwood is one of the most popular scents amongst the residents in the Gulf. Oud's woody strong scent is used in houses and is instantly recognized. The smell of rain, burning wood and sandalwood are situational smells spread after an event has occurred. Rose, jasmine, and vanilla have strong smells that are used occasionally in a South Asian house. One interviewee mentioned that she associates the smell of lemon with her grandmother's house, a memory that represents home to her. Roses are widely used in South Asia, specifically in Pakistan as garlands to welcome guests. The flower jasmine is used in several South Indian occasions as ornaments. These smells are strongly connected to feelings of home and belonging for several South Asian residents in Qatar.

Many interviewees described food and the smell of particular dishes as reminiscent of home. South Asian food tends to have strong smells due to the use of certain spices. The spices identified include turmeric, cinnamon, coriander powder, cumin seeds, mustard, fenugreek, and chilis. Each spice has a very strong smell on their own and can also form stronger smells when mixed together. The objective of this experiment was to consider specific scents and the ways in which to activate them through additional materials such as water



Figure 7. Spinning tops played with by children in Bangladesh (right) and yoyos played with by children in Qatar (left)





Figure 8: Collecting scents identified by interviewees.

and charcoal. Different scents were collected in order to analyze how smell can be stored. For instance, the smell of oud comes from burning charcoal with agarwood and the smell of rain or petrichor forms when the soil is damp. The medium or container to store these types of different smells, must be flexible in structure and form depending on the type of smell. This experiment informed the necessary requirements of the structure and form of the object. Digital tools were used to design 3D rendering of spinning tops (fig 9). The modified and hybridized spinning top are hollowed out in order to incorporate the scents.

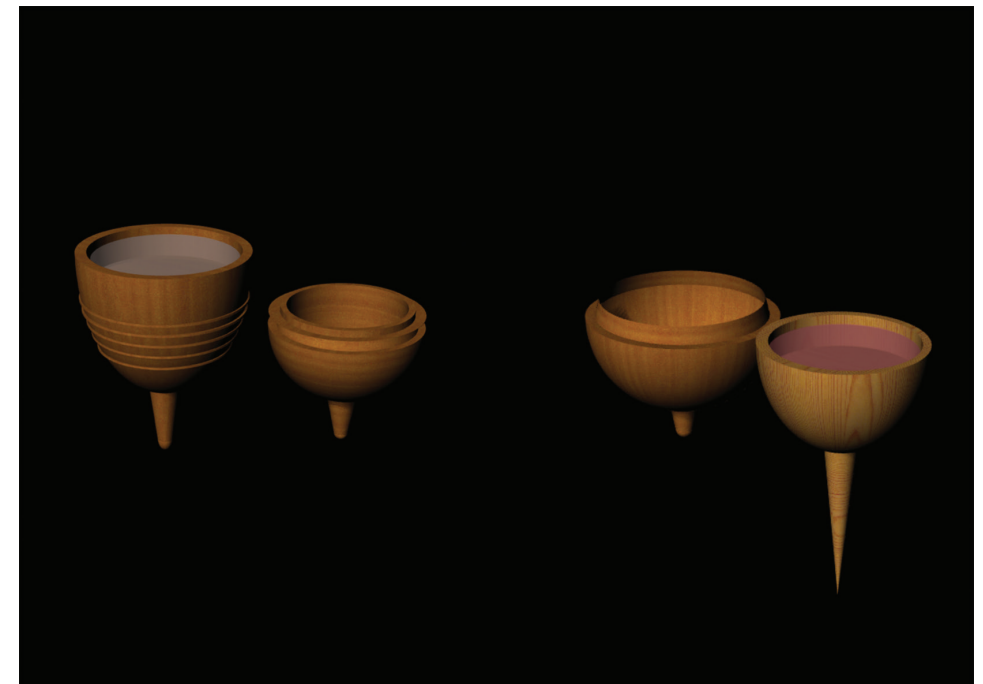


Figure 9: Experimentation with renderings and form of spinning tops

### Experiment #3: Pattern Exploration

South Asian cultures are entwined in language, ethnicity, festivals and traditions. The interviewees described a sense of comfort they felt when there was familiarity in their surroundings. This familiarity was identified as similar patterns in clothing, languages and overlapping of behaviors.

This experiment focused on a connection between visual patterns and memories of home as characterized by interviewees. Traditional methods of pattern making including jamdani, nokshi katha, henna and rangoli were etched on a spinning top. Jamdani is a muslin fabric that has traditional weaving patterns. Nokshi katha, is a traditional stitching method used to sew designs on large fabrics. The South Asian culture has a traditional design for the henna patterns that overlaps across different regions. Rangolis are floral patterns on a surface, created occasionally using powdered materials such as colored rice or flour. These patterns intersect each other in designs across the different countries and cultures in South Asia.



Figure10: Etching pattern on spinning top surface

### Experiment #4: Material and Form

To trigger an emotive response, visual information was incorporated into spinning tops, in a variety of forms. I designed a series spinning tops using various materials such as acrylic, paper and cardboard. The acrylic spinning top was made to add color to the tops. The paper top was designed in order to understand the limitations of the form based on the shape and material. The cardboard spinning top was designed using traditional patterns to test the visuals.

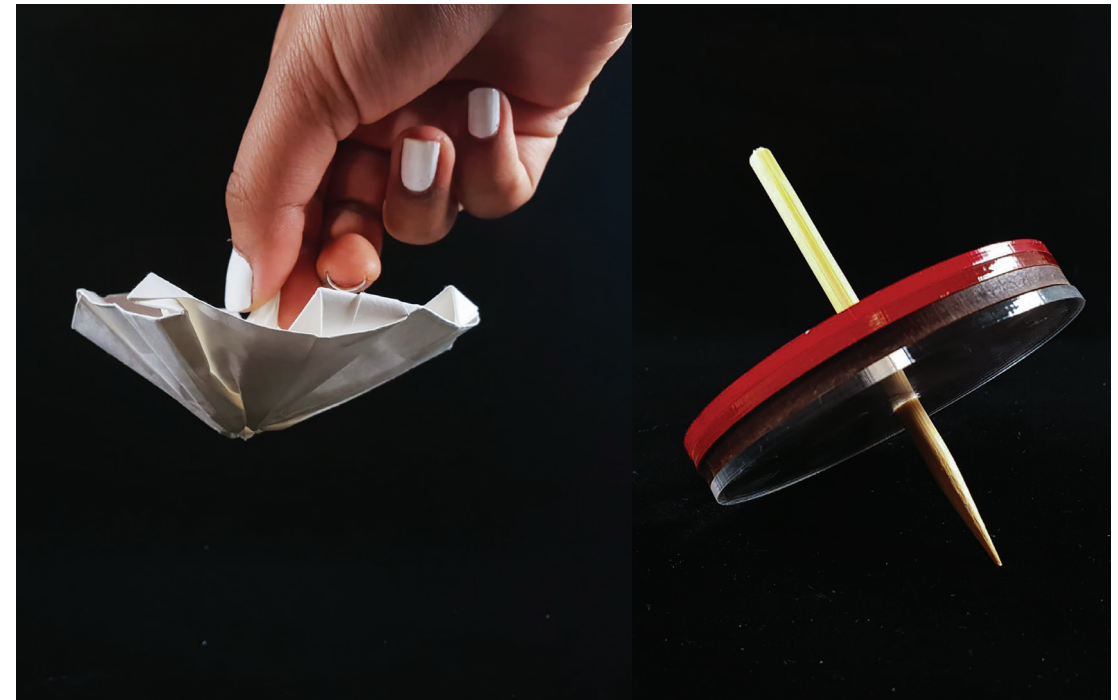


Figure 11: Experimenting with materials, patterns and scale to design different spinning tops

Visual patterns, developed in Experiment #3: Pattern Exploration, were incorporated with material and form from Experiment #4: Material and Form. The acrylic and cardboard tops were not clear in demonstrating the visual concepts such as the patterns. The patterns could not be differentiated when the tops were not moving. The paper spinning top was fragile and did not have stability to spin well. Following this experiment, I decided to use wood and a traditional lathe to produce the spinning tops.



Figure 12: Experimenting with materials and patterns to design spinning tops

Figure 13: Hybrid traditional pattern etched on spinning top



## Artifact Analysis

Through my experimentations, I focused my inquiry on spinning tops and the opportunities they present in a hybridization of form coupled with sensory engagement. The following is an analysis of spinning tops and both their materiality and their interactive qualities.

A traditional wooden spinning top with a nail at its base is used to play games in South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. This was a traditional form of play in British India (now known as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh). The traditional method of making a spinning top is through the use of a lathe. Spinning tops, also known as "Lattu" are common place in the lives of children growing up in these cultures.<sup>[28]</sup> Though spinning tops have been in existence for thousands of years, the traditional way of making these tops is now a dying art form in these countries.

There are key elements in the form of a spinning top that must be addressed in its design, in order for it to function. Maintaining a specific ratio between the stem and the body in the design of a spinning top is essential. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the difference between a pointed and a blunt tip on a spinning top.

In his article 'Spinning tops, Gyroscopes & Rattlebacks' Rod Cross, Physicist at the University of Sydney, explains the balance of spinning top as the "Gyroscopic Effect", which combines the universal laws of inertia, friction and gravity, and the transference of potential to kinetic energy. "The torque is the rotational equivalent of what happens when an object accelerates along a straight line and required to rotate an object. In that case, the force on the object is equal to the rate of change of its momentum."<sup>[29]</sup> In accordance to this, the stem to hold a spinning top should be at the ratio of 1: 7 to the diameter of the spinning top body. This ratio balances the spinning top and spins without interruptions for longer time frame. This finding also determines that, if the top is large in scale it will take more force to spin it for longer time, given that the ratio to balance the top is correct. A spinning top revolves around a vertical axis through its point of support while it spins rapidly about its own axis.<sup>[30]</sup> Hence, a pointed tip for a spinning top allows it to stay in one place while a blunt tip causes the top to travel around the surface.

These physical aspects of ratio and form of the tip will determine the movement of the top in a specific time frame. This information was paramount in the design the hybrid form.

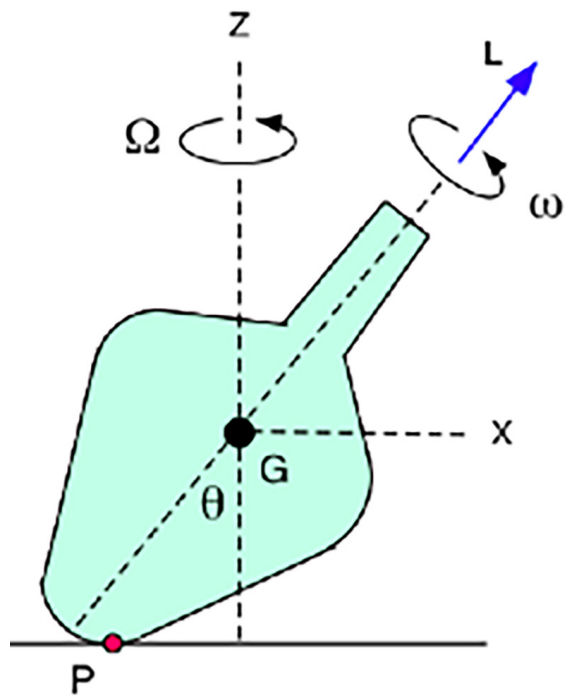


Figure 14: Physics of the movement of a spinning top. The angular momentum vector  $L$  points along the spin axis and rises slowly as the top rises.

Spinning tops are not only demonstrative of notions of play and childhood, but also resonated with a significant number of interviewees as triggering memories of a previous homeland. The experiments explored ways in which sensory elements of visuals and scent could be incorporated into the form. The artifact analysis considered the physical ratio and mechanism of a traditional spinning top in order to function properly. The findings from the interviews, experiments, and artifact analysis concluded that, a spinning top as a medium provides opportunities to investigate the ideas of home and belonging, in relation to South Asian youth residing in Qatar. The variety of traditional forms of the object also allows for the integration of numerous sensory elements. Finally, the top offers a metaphoric translation of the migrant experience – in its endless rotation to achieve balance in place.

# OUTCOMES: WHIRLING HYBRIDS

A series of spinning tops, Da'em, Basar, Itar and Bhar were designed to engage visual and olfactory senses within their structural system. Within the series two sets explored visuals and two sets explored olfactory. Da'em, a set of visual tops, was designed based on the main elements taken from the interviews including family, religion, and Qatari landmarks. Basar, second set of visual tops incorporating and merging different south asian patterns onto the body of the tops. Itar, a set of olfactory tops wherein the sense of smell is incorporated through the use of fragrances. The selected fragrances were identified as significant by interviewees. Bhar, a second set of olfactory tops, incorporates different spices from South Asia. A number of interviewees described food and the smell of particular spices and dishes as reminiscent of home.

## Da'em

Da'em means 'perpetual' in both Arabic and Urdu. Da'em is set of three visual tops designed to represent family, religion, and a specific Qatar landmark. These three were the core common elements discussed in conversations with the interviewees. In exploring the concept of family, religion, and landmarks in Qatar, elements were merged with traditional spinning tops to create hybrid artifacts.

According to one interviewee "Home is where my family is, that is where I feel like I belong the most." This relationship between home and family was shared by all interviewees. The concept of family is translated into the spinning top (fig 15) using a simple form and color. In the spinning top, family is interpreted as a connection to weave ourselves together along with the people we share a close bond. The shapes on the spinning top are a metaphorical representation of family and connections.



Figure 15: Da'em spinning top illustrating the concept home in family

Another interviewee stated, "I feel like I belong the most in circles of faith". This was reiterated by several other interviewees, who talked about Muslim faith as a core factor that connects them to their identity and gives them a sense of belonging. The 'Kaaba' is the most sacred place in Muslim faith and is located in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Pilgrims who visit Mecca are required to perform circumambulation (Tawaf), an act of moving around a sacred object. This top, illustrated in figure 16, is visually inspired by the shape of the 'Kaaba' that is hybridized into a traditional spinning top. The continuous rotation of the spinning tops is a metonymy of the circumambulation.

Another aspect of belonging was tied to the landmarks in Qatar, by the South Asian interviewees. The State of Qatar is driven by its rapid development and is known for its expeditious changes in urban planning.



Figure 16: Da'em spinning top illustrating the concept of religion (Muslim faith)

Numerous interviewees described neighborhoods and landmarks such as roundabouts that they lived next to for decades, as reminiscent of home. This spinning top, illustrated in figure 17, is inspired by the recently demolished sports roundabout in Al Saad, commonly referred to as 'sports roundabout'. The spinning top is a hybrid of a previous roundabout in Doha and a traditional spinning top. This top represents the familiar neighborhoods to the South Asian interviewees raised in Qatar.



Figure 17: Da'em spinning top representing landmark in Qatar (Sports roundabout)

These concepts were gathered from the interviews and were simplified in the experiments. In Experiment# 3: Pattern Exploration considered the specific visuals that to be incorporated into to traditional methods of making a spinning top. The artifact analysis further informed the making of these spinning tops, in relation to the ratio and structure.

## Basar

Basar means 'visual' in Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali. The traditional form of spinning tops was modified in scale, in order to have more surface area to incorporate patterns. Visuals were applied onto the tops by merging different traditional patterns. The Basar series of spinning tops are small with a wide base and surface area for visual patterns. The interviewees described a sense of familiarity experienced through similar patterns in clothing, languages and behaviors. The patterns incorporated onto the spinning tops include Jamdani, Nokshi katha, henna and Rangoli. The visuals on these spinning tops are hybridized and simplified traditional patterns in South Asian cultures. The patterns, typically produced with these individual methods of production, were hybridized by drawing from nuanced regional differences.



Figure 18: Basar spinning tops incorporated with traditional patterns

## Itar

Itar means 'fragrance' in Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali. The sense of smell is incorporated into the tops through the use of spices and fragrances. The selected fragrances were scents identified as emblematic of home and belonging to the interviewees. These fragrances included rain (petrichor), oud, burning wood, sandalwood, rose, jasmine and vanilla. Experiment #2: Olfactory Exploration, focused on incorporating these smells into the structure of a spinning top. The ratio, scale and physical attributes of a spinning top was studied in the artifact analysis, to further modify this object in shape, size and form.

The smells from oils and fragrances are stored in a spinning top that can only be spun using a rope. The traditional rope spinning top was modified in order to store the scent. These rope spinning tops have two-parts, are hollow inside and can be opened to store the various fragrances. The upper half of the top is designed with holes which allow the scent to disperse when spun. The tops have enough space inside them to store a smell that is in either liquid or solid form. As wood absorbs oil, the oil-based fragrances stored in the tops eventually absorb the scent. With the passage of time, these tops can be used for one particular fragrance. This can allow for an increase in the scent's strength over time.



Figure 19: Itar spinning tops incorporated with selected fragrances



## Bhar

Bhar means 'spice' in Arabic and 'abundance' in South Asia. Smell is the strongest sense associated with memory. In accordance, a connection of food is strongly associated with olfactory memory. Numerous interviewees describe food and the smell of particular dishes as reminding them of home. Turmeric, cinnamon, coriander powder, cumin seeds, mustard, fenugreek, and chilis were mentioned by many interviewees.

This hybrid top, illustrated in figure 20, was inspired by the traditional spinning top which is spun on a surface using the tip of the top. Through artifact analysis I found that the traditional spinning top needed to be modified in scale, shape and form, while maintaining specific structural components, in order to store and disperse spices. Similar to the Itar set, these spinning tops have two-parts, are hollowed out inside and can be opened to store spices. The upper half of the top is designed to close and spin the tops.



Figure 20: Bhar spinning tops incorporated with selected spices



# Production: Whirling Hybrids

The spinning tops were produced, in collaboration with an Indian-based artisan, using a traditional lathe. The artisan, Kharadi Chandrakant, based in Gujarat India, has 57 years of experience working with the traditional lathe and tools to produce wooden spinning tops. The traditional method of making these spinning tops is a dying art. As a result, this opportunity to work with a South Asian artisan was an essential element of this thesis.



Figure 21: The artisan getting familiar with digitally designed spinning tops



Figure 22: The artisan getting familiar with digitally designed spinning tops



Working with an artisan provided insight into the potential relationship between an artisan and a designer as well as the potential relationship between digital and analog processes of making. I was able to communicate my designs to the artisan using the 3D renderings. Although, the renderings were designed with precision, the handmade quality of the making process and different wood types has given each spinning top a unique character. The designs of the tops were hybridized through this traditional method of making coupled with references to visual landmarks, patterns, fragrances and food spices which resonate with the personal stories of South Asian residents in Qatar. My designs of the hybridized tops were developed digitally and produced in an analog form. This allowed for an engagement between digital and analog processes of making. I embraced the inaccuracies in the handmade quality of the spinning tops, although the measurements and drawing needed to be accurate on the 3D renders.



Figure 23: Explaining the digital drawings to the artisan



Figure 24: The artisan fabricating the spinning tops using a traditional lathe

# CONCLUSION

The State of Qatar is a highly diverse nation with a large population of foreign residents. This research investigated a dichotomy of belonging from the perspective of South Asian residents in Qatar. The background research analyzed human migration as a recurring phenomenon and the factors influencing the population change in the country in order to redefine migrant identities.

According to communications specialist Priya D'Souza, as of 2017, 60 percent of the resident population in Qatar are from South Asia. These residents are compelled to adapt to new cultures and build a relationship with a foreign land. Hybrid identity is often formed due to crossing borders and overlapping cultures. Reflecting on the background research and inspired by the precedents, this thesis was further investigated using three research methods. These methods included, interviews from South Asian youth residing in Qatar, experimentations, and artifact analysis. According to the interviewees, cultural boundaries have become ambiguous to South Asian residents in Qatar. Home and a sense of belonging,



appear to be driven by memories activated by the senses. An exploration of olfactory senses and experimentation with material, form and visuals was conducted. The form and function of the spinning top was considered as it resonated with a significant number of interviewees as an emotive object triggering memories of a previous homeland.

This research explores the meaning of belonging and the concept of home for the South Asian residents in Qatar through a process of hybridization and the merging of traditional objects and sensory activation. A series of spinning tops was produced in collaboration with a local Indian artisan. Through this collaboration the traditional method of producing spinning tops was merged with visual and olfactory sense elements. These tops seek to offer a metaphoric translation of the unique experience – in its endless rotation to achieve balance in place.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research on this topic could consider belonging and hybridized identities from different perspectives. Due to the scope of this thesis, I focused on South Asian resident youths in Qatar. The approach developed in this thesis could be extended and applied to other types of objects which exist in other hybrid identities of third culture kids. Interviews can be conducted within another specific communities. The findings from these interviews could lead to alternative experimentations and artifacts. I will build on this research and extend it by applying similar approach to different cultures and communities. This will further define the design decisions that will enable me to investigate alternative objects and materials explorations.



# EXHIBITION



# Rabeya Khatoon

## Whirling Hybrids: A Dichotomy of Belonging

Migration is a phenomenon wherein individuals relocate from one country to another, albeit temporarily or permanently, for numerous reasons. The State of Qatar is a highly diverse nation with a large population of foreign residents. According to Priya D'Souza as of 2017, 60 percent of the resident population in Qatar are from South Asia. Growing up in this environment, third culture kids develop a unique, hybrid culture through experiencing multiple cultures. This research investigates a dichotomy of belonging from the perspective of South Asians in Qatar. A series of hybridized spinning tops were produced in collaboration with a South Asian artisan. These hybridized artifacts are infused with sensory materials in order to elicit an emotive response, engage memory, and celebrate the merging of diverse cultures.

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## Rabeya Khatoun

### Whirling Hybrids: A Dichotomy of Belonging

Migration is a phenomenon wherein individuals relocate from one country to another, albeit temporarily or permanently, for numerous reasons. The State of Qatar is a highly diverse nation with a large population of foreign residents. According to Priya D'Souza, as of 2017, 80 percent of the resident population in Qatar are from South Asia. Growing up in this environment, third culture kids develop a unique, hybrid culture through experiencing multiple cultures. This research investigates a dichotomy of belonging from the perspective of South Asians in Qatar. A series of hybridized spinning tops were produced in collaboration with a South Asian artisan. These hybridized artifacts are infused with sensory materials in order to elicit an emotive response, engage memory, and celebrate the merging of diverse cultures.

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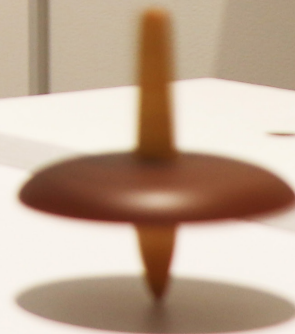
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“ The ache for home  
lives in all of us.”

- Maya Angelou



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